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AUTHOR Clayton, Kermeta Kay; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A total of 2,118 8th-grade, 12th-grade, and community college students (66% were Mexican American) from 11 Texas school districts and 3 community colleges were surveyed to determine the extent of family influence over their occupational and career choices. In addition, 581 parents completed mailed questionnaires and 100 more responded to a telephone questionnaire. Statistical methods were used to compare the responses of the Mexican American students and their parents. The Mexican American students perceived their parents as having greater influence in occupational and educational decisions than did the non-Mexican American students. Paying for college was a major concern of Mexican American parents and students alike. Nearly two-thirds of the parents responding to the mail questionnaire reported annual incomes below $20,000. Frequently, the 8th- and 12th-grade students expected their parents to pay for their college education, and most were either unaware of the possibility of financial aid or did not consider it a viable source of funds for college. Among the community college students, availability of financial aid was the biggest factor in choosing a four-year college. Females valued education and their parents' opinions more than males did. (MN)

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Family Influence Over the Occupational and Educational Choices of Mexican American Students

KERMETA "KAY" CLAYTON, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Home Economics
Texas A&M - Kingsville
Campus Box 168
Kingsville, TX 78363
512/595-2211

GONZALO GARCIA, Jr., Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Educational Psychology
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843
409/845-9692

RACHEL UNDERWOOD, Ed.D
Associate Professor
Department of Home Economics
Texas A&M - Kingsville
Campus Box 168
Kingsville, TX 78363
512/595-2211

PHIL McENDREE, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
College of Education
Texas A&M - Corpus Christi
Corpus Christi, TX 78412
512/994-2731

RICHARD SHEPHERD, Ph.D.
Professor
College of Education
Texas A&M - Corpus Christi
Corpus Christi, TX 78412
512/994-2732

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Family Influence Over the Occupational and Educational Choices of Mexican American Students

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Significance: Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S. today; and of the three major Hispanic subgroups (Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans), the Mexican American subgroup is increasing most rapidly. The research of Fleming (1982) and others suggests that family values and attitudes toward education play a significant role in the educational decisions of students. Otto and Haller (1979) and Buriel and Cardoza (1988) report that aspirations are by far the strongest predictors of students' achievements. Several researchers (Velez, 1989; Otto and Haller, 1979; and Buriel and Cardoza, 1989) report that aspirations are a strong predictor of students' achievements and that a student with high educational aspirations is less likely to drop out of school. Mexican American youths have been reported as having the lowest aspirations and expectations of all Hispanic subgroups; and of all the major minority groups in the U.S., Mexican Americans continue to have the highest dropout rates (Velez, 1989). According to Gandara (1980) and Ybarra (1988), the most influential factor related to the educational achievement of Mexican Americans is the support given by the family.

Objectives: This research focused on the following questions:

- To what extent do Mexican American families influence students' educational and occupational decisions?
- How do Mexican American students perceive the influence of their families on their educational and occupational decisions?
- What other factors influence the educational and occupational plans and decisions made by Mexican American student?
- Are there gender differences among Mexican American students on selected educational and occupational variables?

Methodology: A total of 2118 eighth graders, twelfth graders, and community college students from 11 school districts and three community colleges in Texas participated in the study. Of these, 66% were Mexican American; and they were about equally divided between females and males. A total of 581 parents responded to a mailed questionnaire, and an additional 100 responded to a telephone questionnaire. An advisory committee assisted the project staff in identifying the survey sites, selecting the samples, and developing and validating the questionnaires. The 14 individuals on the committee represented teachers, counselors, and administrators in public schools and in community colleges. Using t-tests, ANOVAs, and correlation coefficients, comparisons were made between the responses of Mexican American students and their parents on selected variables.

Results: Mexican American students in this study perceived parents to have a greater influence than other students on the decision to continue their education, their choice of career, their choice of college major, and their choice of a particular college. Parents in this study also perceived that they have a great deal of influence on the educational and occupational decisions made by their children.

As noted by Garva-Lubeck and Chavkin (1988), it is a misconception that Hispanic parents are not concerned about their children's education. We found that Mexican American parents want more education for their children than their children want for themselves. The fact that Mexican American parents have high educational aspirations for their children is very important because of the great influence they have on their children's educational decisions.

Findings in our study were similar to those of Fleming (1982) who noted that Hispanics had lower educational expectations than Blacks and Whites; however, the majority of Mexican American respondents expected to continue their education beyond high school. A very low percentage of the students reported that they had ever seriously considered dropping out of school.

In terms of factors which play a part in a student's decision to continue his/her education, paying for college appears to be a major concern for Mexican American students. The Mexican American students in our study most frequently reported that a lack of funds might prevent them from continuing their education. Eighth and twelfth grade respondents most frequently saw their parents as a source of funds for paying for college. This finding is disturbing when viewed in the context of reported family income in the study. Almost two-thirds of the Mexican American parents who responded to the telephone questionnaire and almost half of those responding to the mailed questionnaire reported annual family incomes of less than $20,000. This figure is similar to the income figures reported in the literature (Miranda and Quiroz, 1990). The majority of eighth and twelfth grade students were either unaware of the possibility of financial aid or that they did not see it as a viable source of funds for college.

Related to the decision to continue their education, we found that Mexican American community college students were most frequently concerned about availability of financial aid when choosing a four-year college. Other factors they cited were also cost related: location, cost of tuition, and availability of part-time work. In terms of educational aspirations and expectations, we did not find a significant difference between Mexican American males and females in our study; however, females valued education in general more than males and perceived parental influence to be greater than did their male counterparts.